

# IF BIRDS IN A TRUCK

# DOES THE TRUCK

# LIGHTER?

# FLY,

# GET



**group exhibition**

11 / 4 - 30 / 4 / 2019

**Filodrammatica Gallery**

Korzo 28/1, Rijeka

**exhibiting artists**

Aram Bartholl, Branka Cvjetičanin,  
Željko Kipke, Antun Maračić,  
Nika Radić, Erica Scourti

**curator**

Klaudio Štefančić



# IF BIRDS IN A TRUCK FLY, DOES THE TRUCK GET LIGHTER?<sup>1</sup>

Klaudio Štefančić

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No, the truck doesn't get lighter. To be more precise, it is sometimes lighter, and sometimes heavier, depending on the direction of the wings flapping. This was the conclusion of David Lentink at Stanford University, California, who was inspired by the popular American TV show *Mythbusters*. Working with a group of collaborators, Lentink devised a system of measuring aerodynamic forces produced by birds in flight. When a Pacific parrot pulled its wings upwards, the devices couldn't measure any vertical thrust, so the parrot effectively had no weight. When it pushed its wings downwards, the force of the stroke was so big that it doubled the parrot's weight. However, as different birds flap their wings at different times, their strokes cancel out, and the truck, in average, keeps the same weight.

Another group, not avian but human, is being presently studied by another reputable American university – the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). There, within the auspices of Human Dynamics laboratory, a group of scientists led by Alex Petland, is trying to collect enough information about human behaviour on internet networks. In his So-

cial Physics – How *Social Networks Can Make Us Smarter*, awarded as the best book in the field of strategic business in 2014, Petland argues that the ability to collect and analyze great quantities of data related to human behaviour will enable scientists to develop a “causal theory of social structures”. Petland writes that society, as well as nature, functions according to certain rules. It is statistically possible to determine patterns in human communication, and once when we have really understood its logic, as Petland is convinced, we will discover “the basic mechanism of social relations”.

At first sight, parrots in a truck as a scientific problem seem to be a curiosity, or an example of a successful cooperation between commercial television and university marketing, but the way a respectful university approaches the problem of social community indicates a spirit of positivism, which, stimulated by the developing digital technology, once again permeated scientific and business circles. Positivism is the last product of Enlightenment, which was so important, and ambivalent, period in European history that Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer dedicated a whole book to it (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*, 1947). Developing in early 19<sup>th</sup> century, in an age of radical technological change, positivism at first meant a little more than a blind faith in science. In these early years of bourgeois society, science meant astronomy, physics, medicine, etc. – in other words, all empirical practices that originated in the culture of aristocracy and, after the French Revolution, they were left in the windmill of historical events. Stars, planets, bodies, corpses, illnesses, plants, rain, lightning, etc. – these were, in extreme simplification, the primary objects of scientific study. All the rest was left to oblivion, or to religion. Some more time will pass – at the latest, until the

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newscientist.com/article/mg22530054-400-if-birds-in-a-truck-fly-does-the-truck-get-lighter/#.VMSzGGOMJz0>

Romantic Movement ends and aesthetics is established as an independent discipline – before the institution of art becomes the primary area of intellectual and affective events in the life of an average citizen. One of the pillars of German Romanticism, Joseph Schelling, believed that there are areas that science cannot reach, and that these are fields that are predetermined to art. In a fiery opposition to Enlightenment thinkers, the Romanticists argued that not all natural and social phenomena are commensurable, that there always is something defying the law of numbers, causality, and the project of mathematization of the world that, as Adorno and Horkheimer claimed, had begun precisely in the Enlightenment. These Enlightenment ideals of commensurability, utility and expansion – are they not made contemporary again by the appearance of digital technology? Is not the universalism of the number being expanded by “electronic text”, by the codes that run “smart machines”? In the past, all that was not commensurable and usable was considered suspect by the positivists; today, all that is not computable yet – will become computable soon.

Adorno and Horkheimer have not denounced Schelling’s faith in the power of aesthetic experience – experience that is basically a process of perceiving (discovering) something using the apparatus of the senses – but they emphasized that the bourgeois society searched for an alternative to science mostly in religion. In their interpretation, the bourgeois society, from its very beginnings, was a battlefield between scientific and non- or anti-scientific tendencies. Scientification had become the dominant social process, but it never completed, it never consolidated into the connective tissue of secular societies – among other reasons, because the “scientification of the world”, as

emphasized by Jürgen Habermas, was always Euro-centric. Among the dialectic relations in modern society – progressive/conservative, profane/sacred, Apollonian/Dionysian, etc. – art was given an unenviable role, surely not the one that Romanticists had hoped for. It neither connected the community, nor become a vanguard of progress, and it also did not establish itself as the main opposition to modernity, like religion did.

However, could another philosophical system be more suitable to contemporary society, which is, riding on the wave of globalization and populism, all the more often called post-secular? This system gives equal positions to art (aesthetics) and science – as well as love and politics. In his book *Manifesto for Philosophy* (1989) Alain Badiou writes that here are four ways to the truth; they develop in the discursive areas of art, science, love, and politics (for Badiou, philosophy cannot be reduced to gaining knowledge, because philosophy is thinking, and not knowledge). The value of artistic cognition is thus comparable to scientific, amorous, and politic cognition. This, however, does not mean only that art “goes where science cannot go”, but also that art can behave like science, it can be based on the power of positive knowledge and believe in its social efficiency, for example in various utilitarian artistic tendencies. By the same token, art in its cognitive role can, instead of believing in science, express suspicion and fear, and emphasize that being and existing is always more important than what we know about them.

The art works presented at this exhibition refer to discourses of knowledge in various ways. If we were to seek their common starting point, it would undoubtedly be a distrust for basic tenets of positivism – unity of sciences (natural and social) and distinguishing

scientific statements from unscientific ones – whether it is expressed as a critique of causality principle (Željko Kipke, Branka Cvjetičanin), a critique of distancing subject of knowledge from its object (Erica Scourti, Antun Maračić) or as a critique of empirical verification of a statement (Aram Bartholl, Nika Radić). But their most important similarity may lie in the knowledge that what we do not know, or cannot know, is as important as what we (think) we know.

Some of the artists insist on their right to not be rational. “I have never believed in causality. Because you light a match and see a fire, you consider it a law. It is a very nice word, law, but it has no deep validity”, said Marcel Duchamp somewhere. If, after Duchamp, all art is conceptual, according to an aphoristic saying of Joseph Kossuth, then a conclusion by another conceptual artist is entirely logical. In *Sentences on Conceptual Art* (1968), Sol LeWitt wrote:

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1. Conceptual artists are mystics rather than rationalists. They leap to conclusions that logic cannot reach.
2. Rational judgements repeat rational judgements.
3. Irrational judgements lead to new experience.

# ARAM BARTHOLL

***BYOD – Bring your own disc  
(and crush it), installation,  
performance, 2014***

Inspired by the Edward Snowden case, and the bizarre act of destroying computer disks in the Guardian London headquarters in 2013, a year later, Bartholl invited the public to bring their old disks to his solo exhibition, and destroy them using a specially designed device, produced by a German manufacturer (0101 IDEAL). Edward Snowden is one of the best-known whistleblowers in the world. In 2013, aided by several news publishers, he revealed to the public the enormous scale of surveillance that British and American governments were carrying out, using the newest technologies, and not only over their own populations. In 2018, after the dust around Snowden had settled a little, in another article the Guardian tried to describe the absurdity of the situation in which its writers and editors found themselves. When they heard from a government minister that the prime minister, the foreign secretary, the home secretary, attorney general and others in government “have got a problem” with their work and “want the material back”, Guardian’s editors, fearing their reporting will be closed down, negotiated with high officers of GCHQ (the Government Communications Headquarters). The conversation went like this:

- We’ll take the computers away and inspect them—said GCHQ.
- No, you can’t do that.
- OK, we’ll take the computers away, inspect them and destroy them.
- No, you can’t do that.
- We’ll destroy the hard drives in front of you and take away the remains.

- No, you can't do that. How about we destroy the hard drives and memory cards while you watch?
- You haven't got the equipment.
- We'll buy it.
- You'll need a degausser.
- What's that?
- It erases the magnetic field on the hard disks.
- We'll buy one on eBay.
- It costs 25.000 pounds.
- Oh, right. We'll use yours.

It turns out it's quite difficult to destroy a MacBook. Even with the degausser, angle grinders, dremels (drills with high-speed rotating bits), masks, gloves – and a lot of smoke and sparks – it was a couple of hours' work. All under the gaze of GCHQ operatives in a concrete room in the basement of the Guardian's Kings Place offices. And we kept the remnants."



**Aram Bartholl** was born in Bremen (Germany), in 1972. He graduated from the Arts Academy in Berlin in 2002. He has exhibited at numerous solo and group exhibitions, most notably at MOMA (New York), Skulptur Projekte (Münster), Palais de Tokyo (Paris), Biennale in Seoul and Thailand, and at Berlin Hamburger Bahnhof. He has coordinated many workshops, held performances, curated exhibitions and presented lectures at various institutions in Germany and abroad. His work takes place at the intersection of Internet, culture and art, problematising the influence of communication technologies on everyday life, or the world of art. He is particularly preoccupied with the tensions between public and private life and the immersion of the individual in his/her technological surroundings. In 2001, he was a recipient of an award at Ars Electronica festival in Linz (honourable mention), and also at Berlin's Transmediale festival in 2007. He works and lives in Berlin.

# BRANKA CVJETIČANIN

***The Liberation of Tom,*  
installation, 2019**

The Zagreb apartment in which Tom Gotovac spent almost half of his life presently serves as the seat of the *Tomislav Gotovac Institute* association, and it is open to the public. All rooms in the apartment, from the floor to the ceiling, are filled with various objects: posters, bottle caps, clips, paper clip-pings, boxes filled with films and audio tapes, books, objects without clear purpose, various trash, etc. It is obvious that Gotovac not only obsessively watched films, some of them dozens of times, but he obsessively also collected various objects. For an art critic, who is always something of a detective, the apartment is an empire of signs that can lead an interpretation of Gotovac's work to new meanings. Let us now imagine that this unusual space, in which the abundance of sensory stimuli keeps your attention sharp, is in fact a kind of a crime scene, as in movies, which Gotovac considered to be the highest form of artistic expression, and Branka Cvjetičanin as a private investigator trying to delve into the past and find out how it is connected to the present. Because, crime novels are nothing else but knowledge of past events; the present is known, we are where we are, but how did we get here, was there any other way, did we miss something, etc. – this is the problem every investigator is obsessed with. In Auster's *New York Trilogy*, the investigators are so obsessed with the problem – missing person, family secret and so on – that,

in the end, they not only fail to solve it, but they are not sure any more, nor are we, the readers, that it existed at all. Moreover, their inability to distinguish between important and unimportant facts, their distrust in intuition and their blind faith in the causality of events, at the end of the novel threaten the very foundations of their beings – they lose their minds, they retreat from the world. But, let us return what torments the author: has this milieu timely recognized Gotovac's artistic value? In what moment, and why precisely then, did the artistic fame of Tomislav Gotovac begin to go beyond the local milieu? Who was instrumental in this process? What this has to do with New York, Belgrade, Zagreb, or with film as such? Etc, etc...



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**Branka Cvjetičanin** was born in Zagreb, in 1969. Studying contemporary dance and performing arts, she specialised and earned a degree in *site-specific* theatre direction and production at the Moving Academy for Performing Arts (MAPA, Amsterdam). She also graduated in economics at the European Diploma in Cultural Project Management, Brussels (Belgium). In 2001, she was invited by the American theatre artist Robert Wilson to participate in the Watermill programme, a cooperation that lasted until 2004. In 2006, she earned her PhD from Bauhaus Kolleg in Dessau (Germany) on the topic of the United Nations urbanism. Along with her work as an independent artist in Croatia and abroad, she occasionally acts as a producer of fellow artists' works and cultural projects/programmes.

# ŽELJKO KIPKE

***Redeo Rebus Ante Circinum,***  
**oil on canvass, 1989**  
***Boulevard of 9 Lives in 12 Figures***  
***and a P.S., short film (25'50"), 2012***

The painting *Redeo Rebus Ante Circinum*, or as the author freely translated it, I return to things before the divider, was exhibited for the first time also in Rijeka, in December 1989. It belongs to *Mundus subterraneus*, which consists of 13 paintings and one painted board, a guidepost. In the same year, Kipke published his first book, *Illuminators of the New Cycle*, in which, writing about art, artists and artistic events, he sketches the basic contours of his artistic theory. There is, Kipke says, a certain kind of knowledge that is known only to artists. Their cognitive methods have nothing to do with principles of fact and statement verification, or with historical time and geographic space. There is a story, even a kind of causality in Kipke's history of art – in the sense of Kipke writing about the past, mentioning artists who had crucially influenced his work – but it absolutely does not evoke the discourse of humanities. His writing, marked by idiosyncratic descriptions and interpretations of art works, using past and present tenses synonymously, evokes discourses of artistic and political manifestos, prophecies and propaganda. In Kipke's "integral" history, crucial places are taken by "integrators", artists who rose above the normative standards of their time. They are the "guardians of treasures and warehouses", "apostles of the new age", "shamans", "illuminators" – which are some of the names Kipke gives them. When the book was published, Mladen Stilinović was still an Eastern Eu-

ropean outlier, so he was, among others, a privileged resident in Kipke's artistic underground. Byzantine painting, Arcimboldo, Mangelos, Duchamp, Breton, Zenit, Malevich, IRWIN, Laibach, and others, all of them negate standard periodizations based on style or history, and dwell together in Kipke's texts and images.

— the painting is courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art, Zagreb

The short film *Boulevard of 9 Lives in 12 Figures, and a P.S.* also evokes an invisible world that can be approached exclusively through the discourse of art. The narrator, like an obsessive private investigator, leads us in a search for the "Boulevard of 9 Lives". In the real world, the world of normative modernity, this boulevard doesn't exist – here, one should think of the process of marking the streets with letters and numbers for the first time, which in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century had traumatic effects for the residents of big European cities – but in the world of Kipke's art, boulevard is a spacious street that exists in every city. The first-person narration suggests the crime movie or novel; the hand-held camera perfectly simulates the human viewpoint and emphasizes the haste and thrill of the quest, while the editing provides the film with a documentary character. When the camera goes up from a sketch that lies on a table in a café, and continues to shoot the hustle of the city through a glass wall, one might experience a *déjà vu*. With a little intertextual luck, you might see the world with eyes of cinematographic and literary private investigators, you might hear the millstone of causality that constantly rumbles in your head, you might calculate, connect things, places and events, you might light a cigarette and have a drink, hoping that you're on the right track and that the world you are moving through has some meaning after all.



**Željko Kipke** was born in Čakovec, in 1953. He graduated as a painter at the Zagreb Academy of Fine Arts in 1976. His paintings are part of Peter Sutuyvesant collection in Amsterdam, FRAC collection in Toulouse, and the collection of the Museum of Modern Art, Vienna. He represented Croatia at the 1993 Venice Biennale, and the Cairo Biennale two years later. He has written critiques and essays on fine arts and movies. In 2007, he was the curator for Croatia's presentation at the 52<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale. A member of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA), Željko Kipke has published seven books: *Illuminators of the New Cycle* (Zagreb, 1989); *The Subterraneous Guide* (Zagreb, 1992), *Beware of Imitations* (Zagreb, 1993); *From Abundance to the Moon* (Zagreb, 1998); *Any Similarity with Real People and Events is Intentional* (Zagreb, 2004); *February to February* (Zagreb, 2005); *Sei-khai-reich* (Velika Gorica, 2006).

# ANTUN MARAČIĆ

**Maksimir, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007,  
photo-series, 2015**

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While preparing for his solo exhibition “Unintentional and similar works”, in his photographic archive Maračić accidentally found photographs taken on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2007, in Zagreb’s Maksimir Park. Trying to remember his motives for this shooting, the author says he was attracted by the park itself, its “spatial geometry”. While he was taking photographs, some people unintentionally appeared in the camera viewfinder: a female cyclist who was driving along a pathway towards him, and a pair of walkers in the left corner of the image. Intrigued, Maračić continued to take pictures. The reference to Michelangelo Antonioni’s *Blow up* (1966) is obvious. Despite the author’s attempt to “hold his horses” and, in his description of these photographs, associate their creation only with the beauty of the landscape, we as viewers cannot help but see these pictures in the light of the famous film. But, let us go a step further, and include another classic film into our interpretation. *The Conversation* (1974), according to its director, Francis F. Coppola, was directly inspired by *Blow up*. This film is not about a photographer but about a sound engineer who, just like Antonioni’s photographer, records something he did not want to record. In both films, adultery and murder play a significant part, but let us point to what is common to Maračić and the two films we mentioned – the devices: the camera and sound recorders (microphones, amplifiers, tape recorders etc). In a moment,

they change the lives of heroes in the films: tormented by doubt and anxiety caused by the mysterious murder he accidentally took pictures of, Thomas doesn’t pursue the hedonist lifestyle of a fashion photographer any more. In Coppola’s film, an accidental recording of a short conversation between a man and a woman in a public park in San Francisco disjoins Henry from the comfort of everyday life and makes him face the complexities of interpersonal relations. Just when they seemed to control the situation (fashion photography, secret wiretapping), and their devices were, in a macduhanesque way, only extensions of their eyes and ears – something happened, and they became desperate, impotent and anxious because of it. But one must not misconstrue the way events unfolded – the photographic and recording technology is not to blame. It is something like a modern psychopomp, a guide through the importance of relations that the subject establishes with the world around itself. In fact, technology does not alienate us from the world; it only directs us towards it in another way. There is nothing dramatic in Maračić’s photographs. We examine a document of an accidental meeting, a mysterious appearance of the Other (cyclist, walkers), greeted by the camera.



**Antun Maračić** was born in Nova Gradiška on 12 December, 1950. He graduated as a painter at the Zagreb Academy of Fine Arts in 1976. As a multimedia artist, he has had over fifty solo and around hundred group exhibitions in Croatia and abroad. He was a member of the Working Community of Artists “Podroom” (1978–1980), active collaborator (1981–1991, and 1994–2000) and manager (1988–2000)



of the Extended Media Gallery in Zagreb, manager of the Zvonimir Gallery in Zagreb (1992–1997), director of the Art Gallery Dubrovnik (2000–2012), and the manager of the Forum Gallery in Zagreb (2013–2017). He has written many reviews, critiques, polemics and essays on art, published in daily and periodical press. His works are held in the collections of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, the Modern Gallery Zagreb, the History Museum, Zagreb, the Print Collection of the National and University Library in Zagreb, the Filip Trade and Thyssen-Bornemisza Art Contemporary collections.

# NIKA RADIĆ

***A Cigarette with Goran,*  
video (19'05"), 2011**

Democracy, as Wolfgang Sofsky noted, was always tied to partially abolishing privacy, or at least to changing relations between private and public, individual and social. For instance, the French Revolution was an unprecedented attack on human privacy. The information revolution, on the other hand, is changing the relation between private and public that was characteristic of industrial society culture. We live in a society in which voyeurism became norm, but the mere collecting data on politic, nutritional, aesthetic or sexual leanings of citizens, their movement or behaviour, their health records or class position, is not the final goal any more. Police files or encrypted disks, a certain data set about less known activities of citizens, used by a third party to gain social or financial profit; dramatic discoveries, blackmail, confessions and scandals – contemporary sociologists, theoreticians and philosophers argue that all this is not the goal in exploiting human behaviour any more. The real reward is in using the data collected so as to shape the future human agency. Forget the enjoyment in the picture, forget all cultural and artistic associations – a sun room of a bourgeois apartment, nineteenth-century painting, Bergman's *Fanny and Alexander*, etc – that appear when we watch Nika Radić's video – but it is impossible not to ask ourselves at least once what are they talking about, this woman and this man? Who are they? Who is filming them and why? These questions com-

pulsively return to us while we watch. In this quest for missing information, in this need for a deeper knowledge about an event – it seems it is not important to be part of it anymore! – in this need to get to the other side of the appearance (of the image) lies the “scientification” of the world. In Nika Radić’s video, this deeply ingrained need is being thwarted. Maybe the right to opacity is the right that must be recognized as a human right, so we could defend it.



**Nika Radić** was born in Zagreb, in 1968. She graduated as a sculptor from the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb, and as an art historian from the University of Vienna. In her video works, installations and photographs she explores the phenomena of communication, translation and the interpretation of artworks. She has been writing and publishing texts on the same subject in books and international magazines. She has participated in numerous residencies (including Reykjavik, Nashville and Kyoto) and received a number of awards (including the Radoslav Putar Award, Arte and Arta Award and Young European Artist Award). She has had over fifty solo and around hundred group exhibitions in Croatia and abroad.

# ERICA SCOURTI

***Outage, book,  
Banner Repeater, London, 2014.***

*Outage* is the artist’s biography. It was written by a ghost-writer, based on the artist’s digital footprint. Her profiles on social networks, her e-mail correspondence, her various activities on the Web, and other information collected by experts for information security were given to the writer of the biography so as he could describe her life, from her early age on. The problem of identity and its representation is an old artistic theme, but Scourti made it a contemporary one, in an original way. She not only reminded us that there is no unique identity, for instance, on the intersection of what we think about ourselves and what others think about us, therefore a mix of our private and public versions, but she also warned us that there isn’t any already-given personality that we need only to discover. Can we talk about an analogy between the artist and her biography? Was the writer able to get “the real” person, did he, like Cambridge Analytica, also use Facebook likes to discover a psychological profile, the artist’s political preferences, and so on? Scourti draws attention to redefining the relationship between private and public, but what is even more important is that she is pointing at the problem of gaining knowledge by mere accumulation of information. Knowledge is performative, fluid, and incomplete; we are producing it constantly, not discovering it. The artist did not uncover herself on the Web, and consequently in the book, but she construed herself. Created much before

we knew about the scandalous scale of stealing data about values, attitudes and tastes of Facebook users, committed by the private Cambridge Analytica company, the *Outage* biography today seems not only a severe criticism of technological environment but also a courageous and defiant gesture, a slap in the face of big data capitalism.



**Erica Scourti** is an artist and writer, born in Athens and now based mostly in London. Her work explores biographical writing and bodily inscription in the performance and representation of subjectivity. Recent solo shows include *Chief Complaint* at Almanac, London and *Spill Sections* at StudioRCA (both 2018); group shows include the High Line, New York, Wellcome Collection, Kunsthalle Wien, Hayward Gallery, EMST Athens. Her writing has been published in *Spells: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Occult Poetry* (Ignota Press, 2018) and *Fiction as Method* (Sternberg, 2017) amongst others. Scourti is guest editor of the Happy Hypocrite journal (forthcoming 2019) and will be resident at Rupert, Lithuania, in summer 2019. She is currently undertaking a practice-based AHRC-funded PhD in Goldsmiths' Art Department.

# CURATOR

**Klaudio Štefančić** (1969, Sisak) graduated Comparative literature and Art history in 1995 at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, where he also acquired a postgraduate degree in Literature. From 1997 to 2000 he had worked as a curator at Klovićevi dvori Gallery in Zagreb, and since 2001 he's been leading Galženica Gallery in Velika Gorica.

# GROUP EXHIBITION

**If birds in a truck  
fly,  
does the truck  
get  
lighter?**

**Filodrammatica Gallery  
Korzo 28/1, Rijeka**

**exhibition opening**  
Thursday, April 11<sup>th</sup>, 20:00

**gallery opening hours**  
Mon–Fri 17:00 – 20:00

**exhibiting artists**  
Aram Bartholl, Branka Cvjetičanin,  
Željko Kipke, Antun Maračić,  
Nika Radić, Erica Scourti

**curator and author of texts**  
Klaudio Štefančić

**11 – 30 / 4 / 2019.**

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Karmela Cindrić and Goran Vujasinović

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Željko Kipke's painting *Redeo Rebus Ante  
Circinum* is courtesy of the Museum of  
Contemporary Art, Zagreb. We would  
like to thank the Museum for lending  
us the painting for this exhibition.

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